

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1518



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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

124th Year

L10

1518



A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to mankind; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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Publisher: The Glad Tidings Publishing Association
A registered charity – Number 248352

Bible Talks, Study Classes, Sunday Schools and Youth Clubs are held regularly by Christadelphians worldwide. The address of your nearest group can be obtained either from one of the Glad Tidings Distributors listed above, or from one of the contact addresses listed on the back cover.

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Simeon and Anna18

Acknowledgements

Photographs:

Cover: *Helwick Light Ship, Swansea, South Wales, UK*
Ken Anderton

Illustrations:

Clipart.com and iStockphotos

Bible Versions

The version most used in this issue is the New King James Version (NKJV) but other versions are sometimes used.

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Walk in the Light

Only a fool would ignore a light that was flashing to warn him to keep away from difficulty and danger.

The lightship on this month's front cover is now part of Swansea Maritime Museum in South Wales. But it was once located strategically to mark the treacherous sands off the western part of the Mumbles peninsular, at the entrance to the Bristol Channel. It would be a foolish captain indeed who took no notice of that warning.

Helwick (also known as *Light Vessel 91*) was a ship whose sole purpose was to warn other shipping. She had diesel engines, but they were not used to move her. The lightship had to be towed into position by a tug; for her engines were designed solely to generate electricity – to make compressed air for her foghorn and to keep the light shining. Built in 1937 in Dartmouth, this ship had just the one function – to warn others of danger.

God's Messengers

This was something God sent His prophets to fulfil when they were commissioned to explain His purpose. Some people think that prophets were just sent by God to predict forthcoming events. They could certainly do that and Bible prophecy is one of the most remarkable proofs of the authority of the Bible, when it is properly understood. But they did much more. They were God's spokesmen, often pleading with the people to abandon their wilful and wicked ways and turn back to God. Take the prophet Isaiah, for example, who volunteered to serve the LORD.

God's first message to him for the people was about their stubbornness and deafness to everything that He had to say. They would not be able to hear what God asked them to do, because they had blocked their ears; nor would they see what He was going to do, because they had closed their eyes (Isaiah 6:9-13).

But for all their deafness and blindness, God gave Isaiah a vision of Jerusalem's future glory and explained that it would one day become the centre of His kingdom on earth. He was told how all nations will come to Jerusalem to worship and how the beneficial effects of the rulership of Jesus will achieve lasting peace and abundant righteousness. But then God made this appeal through His prophet, one which still resonates with us:

*O house of Jacob, **come and let us walk in the light of the Lord*** (Isaiah 2:5).

God's Visionaries

It was the same with the prophet Ezekiel who prophesied years later, not in Jerusalem but in exile in Babylon. He was commissioned to warn the people among whom he was living that things were very bad in Jerusalem. It was the centre of their hopes and aspirations, because they hoped to be freed and to return to their beloved city. Ezekiel had the difficult task of explaining that the city was so given over to idolatry that God was determined to destroy it and thus bring His kingdom to an end. He gave some very stark warnings to the last king of Judah, a weak and wicked king who

was then ruling over Jerusalem:

Thus says the Lord God: 'Remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same. Exalt the humble, and humble the exalted. Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until he comes whose right it is, and I will give it to him' (Ezekiel 21:26–27).



the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul (Ezekiel 3:17–19).

Ezekiel was well able to predict what was going to happen, and it happened just as he had said. For in 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar conquered the city for the third time and deported all its inhabitants to Babylon. The kingdom of God that had existed on earth for over 400 years came to an abrupt end and now awaits the one “*whose right it is*”, to whom God has promised the Kingdom. And if you think that prediction remarkable, as you should, then bear in mind that Ezekiel also predicted the re-birth of the Jewish nation and their emergence among other nations as a powerful fighting force (see Ezekiel chapter 37). And he had much more to say about events which have yet to happen.

God's Watchmen

But Ezekiel was also given a remit to warn his contemporaries that they needed to put their lives right with God, otherwise they would not be a part of the new world when Jesus returns to rule. God said this to His prophet:

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from my mouth, and give them warning from me: When I say to

These were stern words indeed. Ezekiel had to pass on a warning from God. Otherwise it could cost him his eternal salvation! His role was that of visionary and educator. He had to share his knowledge with the people and fulfil the same sort of role as a lightship warning about imminent danger. But this time the danger was not that someone might get stuck on a sandbank or hit unseen rocks. It was a question of eternal salvation.

We are all sinners and in danger of dying forever. God has warned us in His Word that we need to do something about our inherited condition if we are to be rescued from destruction. God has an escape plan, centred in the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ, which requires us to take urgent action. We have to understand God's purpose, believe what He says, and act upon our beliefs. That means that we have to be baptized so that we can begin a life faithfully following God's teaching.

“Glad Tidings” seeks to warn all its readers that they need to be ready for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. So please, be warned!

Editor

The Road of Life

As a young man late one night I was driving down a country lane. The dim headlights of my old car caught a rabbit – too late for it to move and a moment later it lay dead in the road. I stopped the car jumped out and ran back to the spot. The rabbit was indeed dead, but there was not a mark on it – no apparent cuts or bruises. I thought that would taste good in the pot and a few days later that’s exactly what happened – we feasted on rabbit stew!

As a young father I was once again driving down a country road with a two year old daughter riding in the back. A pigeon sat in the middle of the road. It seemed oblivious to the impending danger and too late it decided to try and fly away. There was the tell tale thump and feathers everywhere. I once again pulled the car over and ran back to the spot where the impact had taken place. There was nothing to be done – just a dreadful mess. My stomach turned over. As I climbed back into the car and drove on, a little voice in the back kept asking over and over again: “What happened to the pigeon, Daddy? What happened to the pigeon?”

Questions, Questions!

Both incidents, separated by time, highlight the way in which we, as human beings, react to the trials, difficulties and suffering in our lives and indeed the changes that take place in us, as we develop and our personal circumstances change. At times we seem oblivious to the suffering going on around us; at others it becomes very personal indeed and we are struck

dumb with no answers to a difficult situation. The other thing we try to do is search around for some specific reason, ultimately for something or someone to blame. Usually it’s God who gets the blame. You know the sort of things people say:

- *“Why does God allow it to happen? I thought He was supposed to be a loving God?”*
- *“Where was God when that happened?”*
- *Even from those who say they don’t believe in God their question is: “What has your God got to say about that?”*

The unfortunate thing is that such people often don’t stay long enough to hear a reply. It has also to be said that whilst our lives are going along trouble free, very few of us stop to ask these sorts of questions, nor do we acknowledge God in any way. So why should He, from any viewpoint, have anything to do with it when things go wrong?

Is God There?

Let’s start from the beginning; with God. We are told, clearly, that,

“Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

This statement marks both the beginning and the end of the answer to all the questions about life that we may have. This Bible verse tells us that there is a rich reward for those who are willing to trust God and who deliberately and carefully seek to please Him in their lives.

The clear implication is that He, and He alone, can give meaning and purpose to our everyday lives. He is the infinite God and we are limited, finite, human beings. He understands and knows everything. We, on the other hand, are going to have times when we simply don't know and when we don't understand what is really going on in our lives. One thing we can be certain of however is what is recorded in the Bible. Its truths are profoundly simple, such as this one:

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32).

God's Reward

So what is the reward that God will give His people? Here the Bible really does speak for itself. Just let your mind dwell on these word pictures given to us by God in His Word:

I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away' (Revelation 21:3–4).

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy (Isaiah 35:5–6).

There are many passages like this which describe a very different world to the one we know today. Revisit those two and read the whole of those chapters (Revelation 21 and Isaiah 35). They will do you good!

Jesus is Coming!

The Bible says that Jesus will return at a time when the whole world seems burnt out and burnt up – on the brink of total ruin;

- ❖ He will save Israel and establish a reign of peace in Jerusalem;
- ❖ He will bring the dead to life again and there will be a judgement;
- ❖ He will give everlasting life to those who have diligently sought to please God in their lives;
- ❖ Then pain and suffering will be removed from the earth;
- ❖ The reward that God has promised is here on the earth;
- ❖ When God's Kingdom is established all our present problems will be sorted out.

What a vision that is for us! God gives us hope in an otherwise hopeless world. If we take a realistic view there is precious little true optimism in the world. People look to their leaders to effect change for the better and are disillusioned within a very short time. And that's no real surprise

The Bible describes wickedness as living without taking God into account. We are fundamentally selfish – self preservation at any cost – seems to be the chief motivation of many people. It has always been like that throughout human history for most people. But there is a better way along life's journey, and we shall examine it in the next issue of this magazine, God willing.

David Nightingale

Quotations from the English Standard Version of the Bible

All Change!

*In his review of world events from a Biblical perspective **Andrew White** has shown that the world is gripped by events which are beyond man's ability to solve. Even when improvements are underway, catastrophic happenings can undo those improvements and plunge the world back into crisis. Yet, as he now explains, these things should help us realise that a change is about to take place.*

Earthquakes and Volcanoes

When earthquakes occur or volcanoes erupt we get a sense of man's inadequacy against the forces of nature. There is a perfectly natural explanation for both events and we now know that earthquakes, for example, are the result of movements to the earth's crust as its tectonic plates move year by year. Earthquakes and active volcanoes have often featured in nature and the annual total of such happenings has not increased markedly in recent years.

The difference has been that these events have occurred in areas of dense population and sadly have caused a tragic loss of life. The disasters in Haiti and China were catastrophic and rebuilding is still underway as people try to get their lives together again. And the undersea earthquake that caused the tsunami in Indonesia is still a vivid memory for many people.

Add to those events the terrible flooding in Pakistan which has made millions homeless and we are forcibly reminded that we live in a world we cannot control and that events can occur which can turn our lives upside-down



It is not surprising that these events, added to many others, leave people anxious and uneasy about the future.

Stress and Anxiety

Long ago the Lord Jesus said that the time would come when stress and anxiety would be a commonplace state of mind:

*There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, **men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory ...** (Luke 21:25-27).*

That time has arrived, for many people are now fearful of what is going to happen next. Those living in earthquake-prone areas or near volcanoes have learned to live with the risks, and hope for the best. But now that sort of anxiety has become widespread. People in work are afraid they might lose their employment. Pressure at work has become really intense and more and more is expected of employees. Western governments have so

over-regulated everyday life that it is almost impossible to live without the fear of being sued for some minor fault. And people live in fear of being found to have done or said something that is not 'politically correct'.

People are often scared to speak out in case their words are misinterpreted, or they are dismissed for interfering in matters that don't concern them. The position is even worse in those countries where weak or corrupt governments care nothing for their subjects and when speaking out might lead to imprisonment or worse. Yet civil unrest is increasing as people come out on the streets to voice their concerns, only for their protests to be quashed and the protesters to be beaten or killed in many instances.

Economic Disaster

A bad situation was made much worse when the economic plans of many western nations went to pieces as a result of over-extended and unsecured lending by banks and financial institutions the world over. Some major players in the financial sector went bankrupt or had to be rescued by government intervention and the result is that many countries are now crippled by debt and have begun to discuss or introduce major cut-backs to try and restore a measure of financial stability. Warnings have been issued about major cuts in public services, job losses, reduced welfare payments, pay restraint, a



longer working life and higher taxation.

People who were already under stress and strain are being stretched to breaking point and public demonstrations have already become a feature in many European countries, whilst the fear of another wave of recession is increasing. Things are changing alright, but the changes seldom appears to be for the better. Many people fear

that 21st Century society is on the road to ruin and that, should this generation struggle through, we will leave the next generation with a huge burden of debt and depression! So is there nothing that can be done?

God's Answer

Listen to these promises which were made about 3000 years ago, but which hold out real hope of a better future when the rulership of the world is changed and incompetence is replaced by someone who is able to right all these wrongs.



Give the king your judgments, O God, and your righteousness to the king's Son. He will judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. The mountains will bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. He will bring justice to the poor of the people; he will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor ... For he will deliver the

needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; and precious shall be their blood in his sight (Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14).

This Psalm is a prophecy of the wonderful Kingdom to be established by God's Son the Lord Jesus Christ. During his life on earth he proved himself to be competent and capable, living in a way that all of us would like to achieve. He 'went about doing good' and began the work of healing the sicknesses of human society. He is the only one who can turn things around in our sick society and those words of the Psalmist are a real promise for all who suffer poverty and injustice caused by uncaring governments and our increasingly wicked society.

World governments say they can stop the tide of destruction from sweeping over society. What else can they say? Long ago in England a king was urged by his courtiers to see if he could stop the sea advancing which of course he could not. Now human governments are like old King Canute, unable to stop the advance of violence, greed and moral decline. But there is a man who can solve these huge problems and deliver real and positive change. That man is the Lord Jesus Christ and when he returns he will bring about a better society and make the world a place fit for God's people to live in. If we want to be a part of that new society, we need to be preparing now for the wonderful change that is coming.

Andrew White

A Reason for Believing in God



Suppose there was no intelligence behind the universe, no creative mind. In that case, nobody designed my brain for the purpose of thinking. It is merely that when the atoms inside my skull happen for physical or chemical reasons to arrange themselves in a certain way, this gives me, as a by-product, the sensation I call thought. But if so, how can I trust my own thinking to be true? It's like upsetting a glass of milk and hoping that the way the splash arranges itself will give you a map of London. But if I can't trust my own thinking, of course I can't trust the arguments leading to atheism; therefore I have no reason to be an atheist, or anything else. Unless I believe in God, I can't believe in thought, so I can never use thought to disbelieve in God.

C.S. Lewis

The Case for Christianity

Part Three

A Christian Conscience

In this series **Dennis Gillett** has explained that a Christian conscience is one which is properly instructed by the Word of God and the teaching of Jesus Christ. Anything less would be just something which reinforces our own prejudices, or is directed by the way that most people think. In this article he applies that reasoning and asks the question whether Christians should take part in military matters.

A Well-Informed Conscience

A Christian conscience, primed and instructed by the teaching of Christ, will tell us when we do right and will warn us when we do wrong and will urge us always to do right, as we rightly understand it. Such a conscience is a force in human nature.

It will protest when we act impurely; when we lie; when we are dishonest and when we are unjust. It will give us no rest when we depart from the solemn will of God. In cases where human judgement has to be exercised it might not be surprising if it leads us to disagree with our fellows.

We come now to the application of the law of Christian conscience and one of the most obvious cases is when we are asked to engage in military service for the country in which we live. Christadelphians claim exemption from military service. We say to governments 'If you compel us to fight it will violate our conscience – it will make us do something which we believe, as followers of Christ, to be wrong.' So we ask to be exempt.

Then we have to prove to the authorities that our belief is well founded and sincere. As we have stressed already,



conscience is an individual matter and it is the individual who is being tested. Let us now examine the reasons why our Christian conscience objects. Or better still, let us think of reasons which we cannot advance, so that any misconceptions are removed.

Wrong Reasons

Christadelphians are not pacifists, if by that word is meant that the use of force is wrong under all circumstances and at all times. Nor are we pacifists if by that word is meant that we believe that by refusing to participate in war, we shall eventually bring about world peace. We believe neither of these things. We do not believe that the use of force is always and wholly wrong because in the Bible there are accounts of how God commanded His people to participate in the use of force. On certain occasions He commanded them to go to war. It is evident that in a world which is dominated by sin the purpose of God is to use force where it is required.

Under certain circumstances it is not God's will that crime and violence shall be allowed to go unrestrained to such an extent as to wholly eliminate law and order in the world. So in the past,

as the Old Testament records, God used war to mould the course of history, to punish the wickedness of violent and evil men and to remove those who were irremediably corrupt. If you do not agree, can I stress that you do not have an argument with me. You have an argument with God, because this was His will in times past, and doubtless still is.

Final Encounter

In the Book of Revelation there is a vision of the final stages of human dominion over the earth. We are told that when Jesus Christ returns in power and glory, he is to be opposed by the nations. This is how that situation is described:

*The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. **These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings;** and those who are with him are called, chosen, and faithful (Revelation 17:12–14).*

In Psalm 2 we are told that King Jesus will break his opponents as people used to crush a potter's vessel, in order to use the clay for some other purpose. This graphic image is used to depict the destruction of those who insist on rebellion. So it is no good being a pacifist on the grounds that force is wrong under all circumstances and at all times. That argument cannot be sustained from the Scriptures.



World Peace?

Nor will pacifism bring about world peace. The picture of human society which is presented in the Bible just prior to the end of human government is one in which war and crime and evil abounds. Jesus foretold the future like this:

As the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be (Matthew 24:37–39).

One of the features of Noah's day was violence. Indeed one of the signs of the Messiah's coming is wars and rumours of wars. Pacifism is not the essence of our case by any means. Nor will it do to say that one of the Ten Commandments says "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). People to whom that commandment was given frequently went to war with God's approval. So evidently the command is not an absolute prohibition upon taking up arms when necessary.

Positive Reasons

The first occasion when Christadelphians as a body actively declared their attitude to war was in the American Civil War of 1865. There were some Christadelphians in the North and some in the South – on either side of the line of conflict – and they resolutely resolved that they would not slay each other, come what may. Instead they petitioned the

Confederate government and the United States government to grant them exemption from fighting in the war. Their conscientious objection was recognized. The next occasion was the Russo-Turkish war of 1877, when the Parliament of Great Britain was petitioned in the same way and for the same reasons as in 1865 in America. It was so again in 1915 in the Great War and in 1939 in the Second World War.

All down our communal history the attitude to war has been the same. We have refused to take part in fighting and have sought exemption from military service, because we believe that to fight and kill would be contrary to our faith and a defiance of God's will, as we understand it. At first sight this may seem to be contradictory to what we have said already about war being permissible in certain circumstances, but in order to understand our attitude to war it is essential to understand our attitude to life. The two are bound up fundamentally.

Jesus is Coming!

The central feature of the gospel as we understand it is the kingdom of God and the great central event which will bring that to pass in the earth is the second coming of Jesus the Messiah. When he comes, peace and righteousness and purity will be established through his perfect government. When Jesus was on earth he taught his disciples:

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:33).

This is a call to recognize his kingship and his government so that in prospect his followers become citizens of his coming kingdom. The first step in

seeking the kingdom is to submit to its king, believe in its laws, make a commitment to its government and give unqualified allegiance to the king's service. The point to be emphasized now is this. Where the sovereignty of God is recognised and where there is submission to his government, and where there is allegiance to God's king, the master principle of the kingdom of God is established.

This master principle was the force that impelled the Christian church in the New Testament. They saw themselves as an elect race, a company of people who were 'called out', who were unified by a common faith and a common life. They were a group whose real vocation and real destiny were not any longer in this age and in this society. The real destiny of true believers begins in the age to come, but they are to be mastered by the principles of the kingdom of God even now. The values of that kingdom must now prevail even 'love, joy and peace'..

This was the master passion of the New Testament 'ecclesias' – congregations of believers. They were attached by very light ties to the countries of this world. They were essentially part of God's coming kingdom and knew themselves to be but pilgrims passing through this world to another, even the world to come.

The only government to which Christian believers can give unqualified allegiance is the government of God – now and in the age to come. Followers of Jesus are to be people who wait 'for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God' (Hebrews 11:10). They therefore count it wrong to participate in the wars of the nations since their Lord and King has forbidden it to them.

Dennis Gillett

Could this be a Miracle?

We walked around the port beneath cloudless skies. Swans glided safely between the boats in the marina. A yacht rocked slowly in the swell, but from its stem hung an Israeli flag. That was remarkable. In fact it was a miracle. It was a sign that for the first time in nearly 2000 years a nation had been re-established in the land where their forefather Abraham had walked. No other nation could claim such a privilege.



live so He gave them laws that would help them show a better way of life from that which was the result of mere human thinking. God's way of living would have kept them safe and well, come what may, but there were severe consequences if they abandoned their calling and followed the example of their neighbours instead.

God's Promises

Israel is often in the headlines for the wrong reasons as the nation is accused of violating human rights or not striving hard enough for peace with its neighbours. But the Bible has headlines of a different sort – many wonderful promises about what would happen to God's people over the centuries, and what their options were.

God had said that He chose them to be a special people, more special than any other nation on earth:

“You are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth (Deuteronomy 7:6).

This was a privilege but it was also a challenge. It meant that they had to show the same steadfast faith that had been demonstrated by their forefathers – people like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God expected them to be a holy nation – an example to all other nations of how God wants people to

Prosperity or Poverty?

One cannot dishonour God with impunity. Moses spelled it out for them. If they obeyed God they would be abundantly blessed but disobedience would bring severe reprisals – severe enough to bring them back to the right way, when they realised their foolishness. Israel was a nation born in adversity – after the trials and rigours of Egypt. God has demonstrated that he could deliver them from all problems, however great. And when they entered the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership they had a taste of how good things could become.

Under kings like David and Solomon, Israel prospered. Their territory increased; they were a powerful and prosperous nation with a lot of local influence and life was good. But it was not like that for long. The nation split in two, becoming 'Israel' (in the north) and 'Judah' (in the south). They were often at war with one another, or with surrounding nations and eventually their very survival was in doubt. The northern tribes went into exile when the Assyrians defeated them and the small nation of Judah was later con-

quered by the Babylonians (ancient Iraq). That was the end of either nation as an independent entity. It was re-established for a while, but almost always under the control of world super-powers – Persia, Greece and then Rome.

Survival or Destruction?

Every now and again the militant faction flared up and tried to achieve national independence. For a while they were successful and a Jewish state was established, but not for long. When the Romans conquered the area they held power with a firm grip and were quick to crush any attempted rebellion but eventually they concluded that the only way to establish peace in the area was to deport the nation and close down the country!

They did that by two major campaigns which resulted, in 70 and 135 AD, in huge Jewish losses and mass deportations. The Jews that survived were scattered throughout the nations and were often moved on from place to place, as nobody wanted them to settle there.

The options had been presented to the nation by the prophets – survival with God’s blessing or national destruction. But, even when the latter was chosen, God did not leave them without hope. This is how the prophet Jeremiah described God’s everlasting love for His people:

The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with loving kindness I have drawn you. Again I will build you, and you

shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! You shall again be adorned with your tambourines, and shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice’ (Jeremiah 31:3–4).

Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.’ For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, streaming to the goodness of the Lord for wheat and new wine and oil, for the young of the flock and the herd; their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, and they shall sorrow no more at all (Jeremiah 31:10–12).

Gracious Promise

Could any nation have had such tender care, or so magnificent a promise? Their very presence in the land once occupied by their fathers should be a wake-up call for every true Christian. The existence of Israel as a re-born nation should demonstrate to everyone that God is working in the midst of the nations to fulfil His Divine plan, a plan which is centred in Israel, and with His people.

But are they a nation in waiting for their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ? There are five and a half million Jews in Israel, but the majority take no heed to their glorious destiny. That might appear to be disappointing but again it is a fulfilment of Bible prophecy. For the Bible explains that when Jesus returns it will be to a largely unbelieving nation. It will be



the coming of Jesus that causes them to change their minds and acknowledge their past blindness. As the prophet declared some 400 years before Jesus was born:

I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for him as one grieves for a first-born (Zechariah 12:10).

Coming Traumas

The immediate outlook of the Jewish nation is bleak according to the prophet Zechariah. Statesmen try desperately to establish peace in the area, but the Middle East is like a cauldron ready to boil over at any time. Some commentators have said that if it

should happen the next war could be the Third World War. What God has said, in His Word, is that such a conflict will be the precursor to worldwide peace.

The call to us is to be prepared. God is in control of the affairs of man and of angels. The rule of men will end, and Paradise will be restored. Joy will encircle the earth, and from the new Jerusalem peace will go forth to all nations. Will we be like the nation of Israel in the past and treat the message with scorn? Or will we see a supreme intelligence speaking to us in our Bibles? We are puny mortals; yet the Almighty has spoken to us in love. Will we have the humility and compassion to respond? God is waiting for us to do just that.

Ken Clark

Grace through Faith

We are told to seek first God's Kingdom
Seek for His righteousness too,
So we need to search in the Scriptures,
Because God's guidance is true.

By grace, through faith, comes salvation
Unto the ones who have heard,
For faith comes through what God has written
Within His most holy Word.

Faith which comes by imagination
Can't be proved, so is untried:
It's by reading what God has spoken
That we can be edified.

By proving all things, truth believing,
We will not be led astray:
Our faith and our hope will be strengthened,
Walking by love in God's way.



Gwen Marley

Paul Appeals to Caesar

In prison at Caesarea the apostle Paul has been frustrated by the delaying tactics of the Roman governor Felix. He had been a prisoner for more than two years and had been questioned several times by Felix but when he was replaced by Festus things seemed to be no better. For the new Procurator visited Jerusalem and forthwith began to institute trial proceedings again. What would happen next?

More Delay?

Although he was a Roman citizen, Paul was not exempt from trial on religious grounds and, even if convicted, he was expendable. Festus still had the final veto on capital charges so there was nothing to lose and, since he was to preside at the trial, he would still be in charge of events. Festus next asked the prisoner whether he would be willing to be tried in Jerusalem. One can only assume that he asked this because Paul was a Roman citizen and he was conscious of the privileges associated with that status.

Paul quickly realised what was happening. The proposal was just another delaying tactic and a sop to Jewish sensibilities. If the case could not be resolved in Caesarea (after two attempts) why should a change of venue make any difference? The suggestion was nothing but a ploy to placate the Jews and defer a decision. Paul also recognised the danger of another ambush attempt which, if not fatal, might result in injuries which would hinder his intention to travel to Rome and preach there.

Two years had already passed and he was no nearer beginning his journey. The Lord Jesus had assured him that he must bear witness in Rome (Acts 23:11) yet no progress had been made. Drastic measures were now required!

So Paul replied:

I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:10-11).

Appeal to Caesar

This was a totally unexpected 'bomb-shell'! The Jews had pushed too hard this time and could not now recover the situation: there could be no trial in Jerusalem. Festus had also misjudged the situation and he too would be shocked. This, his first case in the Province, involving the trial of a Roman citizen, had resulted in an appeal! Paul was saying, in effect, that he had no confidence in Festus and was asserting his right to be heard in the highest court of the Empire.

Festus conferred with his legal advisors, who assured him that Paul's appeal was quite in order and that there was absolutely nothing which he could do. So he in turn declared:

"You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!" (Acts 25:12).

It has been suggested that Festus might have been relieved to get rid of

an awkward responsibility. Certainly, he took Paul's declaration as a claim to be tried in Rome rather than simply a statement to the effect that he would submit to Roman law but not be judged by Jewish law. It seems that, following the violent treatment which he suffered at the hands of the Jews in the Temple, and in spite of his concessions to the practices of Judaism, Paul resolved to abandon his Jewish nationality and, as the 'apostle to the Gentiles', rely solely on his Roman citizenship.



and they petitioned him, asking a favour against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem – while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him (Acts 25:2–3).

Since Festus made it clear that it was not customary for Romans to condemn a man to death until he has had the opportunity to defend himself, it is evident that the Jews had asked for Paul's execution. Festus' comment is interesting for it implies that the Jewish authorities had been able to secure executions in the past without the due process of law.

Visit of Herod and Bernice

Herod Agrippa II, who ruled territories in the N. E. of Palestine with the status of a king, along with his sister Bernice, paid a courtesy visit to Festus shortly after his accession. A petty king needed to cultivate the friendship of a high-ranking Roman official. Luke says that Festus only raised the problem of Paul's case after '*certain days*'. Perhaps by now the conversation had become strained and Festus remembered something with which Agrippa could assist him! Another trial would also provide some entertainment for his visitors.

Festus explained that there was in Caesarea a prisoner, left in custody by his predecessor Felix, whose case had not been resolved satisfactorily. Festus then set out the background. The prisoner was clearly a problem to the Jewish hierarchy, for when Festus visited Jerusalem they had asked for his execution. This is mentioned earlier in the chapter:

Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul;

The Lord Jesus' own "trial" seems to have been arranged on the assumption that the Roman governor would ratify his condemnation automatically. In the event, it was necessary to force Pilate's hand by raising a tumult and suggesting that he was failing in his duty by tolerating the Lord's claim to kingship. In Paul's case, the Jews were not going to risk rejection of their accusations and were plotting to murder Paul in an ambush, as in Acts chapter 23, verses 12 and 20-21.

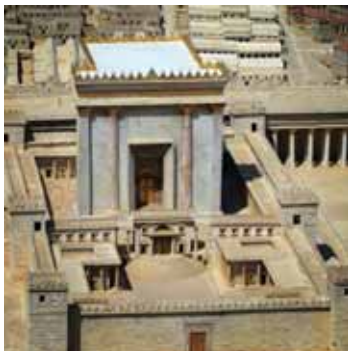
Festus' Problem

Festus then recounted how he had arranged for a hearing of the case, once the Jewish hierarchy had come to Caesarea. He had been amazed at the case against Paul, for it did not consist of normal criminal activities but related to aspects of the Jewish faith. So he would really be glad of Herod's help in sorting this out so he could send a meaningful report to Rome.

John Hellowell

Simeon and Anna

Simeon and Anna were two faithful people who worshipped at the Jerusalem Temple. Both waited for the coming Messiah as their Old Testament had foretold.



One day a poor couple and their baby arrived with the offering prescribed by the Law, to present their newborn son to the LORD, The child's mother also required purification according to the Mosaic Law. Simeon saw something extraordinary in this little family. At last, the hope of Simeon's life had appeared and, by means of the Holy Spirit, he recognised in the small bundle the fulfilment of God's promise of salvation for all.

Luke does not say whether or not **Simeon** was a temple priest, but since he prophesied and was possibly approached by Mary and Joseph when they brought Jesus for presentation, makes it credible that he was one of the priests.

Anna, too, despite her 84 years, rejoiced that salvation had come to Jerusalem in the form of this child. She began to tell all who, like her, were looking for the nation's redemption and that the Redeemer had finally come.

When was this?

It happened when Jesus was just a few days old, so you might think that it can be dated precisely (to 1 AD). But the compiler of the Christian Calendar got

a few things wrong. Herod, who was alive when the wise men came looking for Jesus, died in 4 BC, so that would be about the time that Jesus was brought to the Temple by Mary and Joseph.

You can read about this encounter between a young family and these two aged people in Luke

chapter 2, verses 21 -40. it is an account that comes just after the glorious account of Jesus' birth and the angels' appearance to the shepherds in the fields (Luke 2:1-20).

Why this Visit?

Mary and Joseph were a devout Jewish couple, anxious to keep the Law and we are told that Jesus was born under the Law of Moses, which was God's law for the nation at that time:

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4,5).

They had already circumcised and named Jesus on the eighth day (Luke 2:21). Now he had to be presented to the Lord as the law required (Exodus 13:2,11,12; and Numbers 3:11-13). And Mary herself had to be purified according to the Law (Leviticus 12:2-6,8).

What Happened?

In the Temple, the righteous and devout Simeon, took the infant Jesus

into his arms and asked God to permit him now to die (Luke 2:29). Simeon's life of service was over.

It was an occasion full of symbolism, for in Simeon we have a picture of the old, dying Mosaic Law, holding the promise of salvation in its arms. Looking into the eyes of the New Covenant (Jesus), he knew that the time had come for the Old Covenant to end. Something better had come.

Simeon in Hebrew means '*hearing*'. Luke says he was waiting for the '*consolation of Israel*' (Luke 2:25). That means that he was expecting a time when the nation of Israel, then subject to Roman occupation, would at last be free. In fact, Jesus had come first of all to set them free from the bondage of sin.

Anna, too, looked '*forward to the redemption of Jerusalem*'. She was wanting more than liberty from foreign occupation, but freedom from the sin that has a hold on all people. A widow for many years and possibly childless, like Simeon, Anna typified the aged, barren nature of the Mosaic Covenant and delighted to tell about the fulfilment of God's promise of a Messiah, to any in the temple who would listen (Luke 2:38.)

Simeon looked on the child Jesus, whose Hebrew name, Joshua, means 'God saves' and prayed: '*My eyes have seen your salvation*' (v 30).

He continued to say that this salvation was a light of revelation to the Gentiles (non-Jews) and for glory to the people of Israel. In other words, Jesus' salvation was for all people, an echo of what the angels had said earlier to the shepherds. It confirmed, too, what Isaiah prophesied; that Messiah would be 'a light for the Gentiles' (Isaiah 9:1-2; 42:6; 49:6; 60:1-3)

Simeon blessed the little family, and made three startling prophecies, that:

- ✓ Jesus would cause both the rise and fall of many (Luke 2:34);
- ✓ Jesus would be a sign spoken against (v 34);
- ✓ Mary would suffer greatly by what Jesus did (v 35).

All these were fulfilled exactly as foretold.

What do we learn?

- ① The next chapter in Luke gives a list of some important people in the world at that time, starting with the Roman Emperor, Tiberius Caesar. Yet God's Word came not to any of them, but to a humble man in the desert (Luke 3:2). From rough shepherds on the hillsides to the open-hearted Simeon and Anna, these verses show that God chooses the humble, not the mighty (Isaiah 57:15) to whom He reveals Himself and His purpose.
- ② From Simeon's predictions we learn that God's salvation is for all people: Jew and non-Jew alike, for we all need to be saved from sin.
- ③ Jesus was born into a devout and caring home where God was the centre; a pattern for us to follow.
- ④ There were some in ancient Israel who patiently waited for the appearance of Messiah, hoping, like Simeon, that they would live to see His coming. Jesus will come again, a second time (Acts 1:11). Are we known to God? And are we patiently waiting and looking for His Son's return? We should be!

Joan Lewis

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